

# HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

## Press Statement



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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### **PATIENT SAFETY, FIRST PRIORITY**

#### **Statement from Secretary Kim Belshé on Nurse Staffing**

**S. KIMBERLY BELSHÉ**  
SECRETARY

SACRAMENTO - Patient safety is a top priority for this Administration. A fundamental part of protecting patient safety is ensuring access to health care and maintaining adequate hospital nurse staffing.

The current minimum standards for nurse staffing in hospitals are safe. These nurse-to-patient ratios are the same today as when they took effect Jan. 1, 2004. Contrary to what others have said, we are not changing the nurse-to-patient ratios.

In addition, protecting patient safety demands that we not only maintain safe minimum standards for nurse-to-patient ratios, but also take no action that would negatively affect patient access to health care. Consider these facts:

- The nursing shortage is real. Healthcare facilities are competing for nurses. Hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, home care and other providers are reporting difficulties in filling nursing positions. A University of California, Davis, analysis shows that changing the ratio of nurses to patients would require an estimated 2,360 additional nurses statewide, thereby exacerbating the nurse shortage. According to the original plan for implementation of the nurse-to-patient ratios, these nurses would need to be available by Jan. 1, 2005.
- California consistently ranks 49<sup>th</sup> - 50<sup>th</sup> nationwide in the number of registered nurses per capita, with 30 percent fewer nurses than the national average. The Federal Health Resources and Services Agency has projected that by 2010 California will need more than 42,000 additional nurses to meet the overall demand by the health care delivery system.
- Eleven hospitals have identified nurse-to-patient staffing ratios as a cause for the closure of their respective hospital, emergency department or psychiatric unit.
- Four hospitals have petitioned the California Department of Health Services (CDHS) to suspend the use of available beds because of the inability to provide enough nurses to care for the patients.
- Between 2003-2004, seven emergency departments have closed in the greater Los Angeles area.

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In establishing safe minimum nurse staffing standards, CDHS conducted an exhaustive literature search, extensive analysis of the data that the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development collects, on-site study at more than 90 hospitals statewide and evaluated input and recommendations from professional groups, stakeholders and more than 25,000 individuals and organizations.

CDHS is developing an accelerated study to determine the patient, workforce and institutional effects of the current ratios. The public comment period on the emergency regulations begins Friday, Dec. 3 and will continue through Jan. 21, 2005. A public hearing on those regulations is scheduled for Jan. 18, 2005, in Sacramento.